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Tuesday, November 16, 2010

Dear FCC Commissioners:

We are writing on behalf of the Chicago Independent Radio Project (CHIRP), a 501(c)3 organization in Chicago. CHIRP is dedicated to providing Chicago residents with a community radio station focused on the representation of local people, events, and issues alongside a wide array of local and independent music. We seek to promote localism, diversity, and independence in public broadcasting via programming and web content curated, created, and produced by Chicagoans.

We are writing to you today out of concern for the proposed “ten cap” on translator applications. We believe that the “ten cap” would make it nearly impossible for CHIRP or other community organizations in Chicago to successfully apply for an LPFM license. In fact, a recent study from the public interest group Common Frequency demonstrates that a ten cap will do little to preserve space on the dial for future LPFMs, and that this problem would be even more pronounced in urban areas like Chicago. We ask you to preserve spectrum for future LPFM stations and find a different solution to resolve the translator auction issue. If this does not happen, CHIRP may never have the chance even to apply for an LPFM license before all of the spectrum is taken. The FCC should prioritize localism, particularly taking into account the situation of already operating local community radio stations like CHIRP, in setting policy for translators and low power FM.

We have ample evidence that there is a great deal of passion for community radio in Chicago. Since January 2010, CHIRP has operated CHIRPradio.org, a live, online community radio station staffed entirely by volunteers, delivering original programming 21 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. We have more than 150 volunteers, over a thousand donors, and thousands of listeners; and enjoy wide support and admiration from Chicago’s cultural community. In short, in just the ten months the radio station has been up and running, even limited by its online-only nature, we’ve seen great success, proving the demand for local, community-oriented radio even in big cities like Chicago.

However, while CHIRP’s work in online radio has been successful, we recognize that many potential listeners are shut out from tuning in because they do not have access to a computer. The people hurt by this lack of access to technology are those whose voices are most traditionally shut out from media – the poor and disenfranchised. It has always been our intention to apply for a low power FM license so we can better serve all residents of the city of Chicago.

Local radio remains extremely important to its audience, as we’ve seen from the amazing response to the online version of our station. We know we could greatly improve our community service with the addition of a broadcast signal. We hope you will take the concerns of organizations like ours into account when making your decision, and to be sure to preserve opportunities to license new LPFMs in urban areas.

Sincerely,
Shawn Campbell
President, CHIRP
Jennifer Lizak
Vice President, CHIRP